



A Look Back at 2019

We had a very exciting year at the Mass Fair Housing Center as you can see from this top ten+ list of accomplishments

- Prevented eviction of a domestic violence survivor. In January, we represented a survivor of domestic violence whose abuser excluded her from her home, after she obtained a restraining order. When the housing authority threatened to terminate her Section 8 voucher, we appealed and won a victory that meant she could return to her home, stop the physical abuse, and live independently for the first time in her adult life.
- Filed legal challenge to the Massachusetts Lead Law for discriminating against families with children in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act. For nearly 50 years, the Mass Lead Law has incentivized landlords to refuse to rent to families with children under age six, rather than abate the lead paint in their dwellings. According to the Mass. Department of Health, since 1971, only 10% of all the housing that is presumed to have lead paint has undergone a lead inspection and lead abatement. This leaves children under age 6 exposed to significant health hazards in 1.8 million units across the Commonwealth. [We seek to reform the lead law to end housing discrimination and prevent childhood lead poisoning.](#)
- Held our 13th annual Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference. In April 2019, MFHC, along with our co-sponsors, Wayfinders, Western New England School of Law and the Boston Public Housing Authority, welcomed 300 civil rights advocates to our [13th](#)



[annual conference](#). Our keynote speaker, Boston City Councilor Lydia Edwards, received a standing ovation after sharing her vision for creating policies to promote greater equity and inclusion in the Boston housing market and beyond.

- Won Probable Cause finding against a large housing provider for discrimination against Deaf tenants. A multi-year investigation revealed that staff at the Pynchon and Edgewater Apartments in Springfield did not provide communication access to Deaf applicants for housing. Peabody Properties, which owns the apartment complexes, also owns

10,000 units in New England, New Jersey, and Florida. MFHC filed a complaint against Peabody with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, and received a finding of probable cause that Peabody discriminated against individuals with disabilities.

- Won \$16,000 settlement against repeat offenders. When a Springfield property management company published a rental ad to “students and young professionals only” in 2016, we conducted an investigation which produced strong evidence of housing discrimination against families with minor children and people with disabilities. We then filed a complaint and eventually settled the case by requiring the property managers to cease their discriminatory practices, obtain fair housing training and pay MFHC \$5,000. Two years later, the same managers formed a “new” company and continued to discriminate against families with children. MFHC filed a second complaint and settled the case in July, requiring the property managers to attend another fair housing training, publish affirmative advertising of available rental properties and pay MFHC \$16,000.
- Created 32 new lead-safe units. To help increase the availability of lead-safe rental housing stock for families with children, whenever we settle a complaint against a landlord for refusing to rent to a family due to the presence of lead paint, we ask the landlord to delead the property. This ensures that they will not be incentivized to discriminate against families with children in the future. In 2019, our settlements help to create 32 new lead-safe units for children under age six.

- Launched new website! In 2019 we launched our new [website](#). Visitors to the website can learn more about housing discrimination, submit on-line intakes, donate to MFHC, and apply for an internship.



- Awarded contract to conduct Analysis of Impediments. In October, 2019, we were excited that our collaboration with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Donahue Institute, and D-pict (a graphic arts organization) was awarded a contract to conduct an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing in Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee and Westfield. We are looking forward to working with our partners to create a meaningful plan with actionable steps to affirmatively further fair housing in our region.
- Filed complaint against Kamins Realty for discriminating against families with children. After an extensive investigation, we found that families with children were repeatedly discouraged from renting in certain apartment buildings in Amherst that Kamins Realty identified as being better for students. We filed a complaint that was accepted by HUD against Kamins for steering families with children in violation of the Fair Housing Act. Families in the Amherst area often struggle to find affordable housing, particularly where much of the real estate market is controlled by large real estate agencies such as Kamins. By discouraging families from renting in particular buildings, Kamins limited the market for families with children, who have a right to equal access to all available housing.
- Obtained fully accessible modified apartment for family with a child with disabilities. A mother contacted us due to the difficulty she was having with pushing her son's wheelchair up a very steep grassy hill in order to access the street where her son's bus picked him up. Through our advocacy, we were able to obtain a transfer for the family to a fully accessible apartment that was at street level and had a parking space near the unit.
- Secured \$30,000 in damages for victims of Section 8 discrimination. When landlords discriminate against tenants with Section 8 vouchers, they often perpetuate segregation by denying families the opportunity to move to neighborhoods of their choice. Through our advocacy this year, we secured \$30,000 in damages from landlords and property managers who refused to rent to individuals who had Section 8 vouchers.



Save the Date!



This year our 2020 Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference will be held on **Friday April 24** at Western New England University. We will be

sending updates as we get closer to the event.



A special message from MFHC's Board and Staff

During this time of reflection, we are especially grateful for the ongoing support we have received from those kind and caring individuals who have decided to make generous donations to MFHC. If you have not yet given to MFHC, please consider a donation that will help us continue our work to protect individuals and families from homelessness and the many other destabilizing consequences of illegal housing discrimination.

[Donate](#)

*Wishing you all a joyful holiday season
and a happy new year.*



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